



City of Grand Rapids

#GRTalksBack Listening Sessions Summary details resident feedback

07/24/17: GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Feedback listed in a new #GRTalksBack Community Listening Session Executive Summary details topics residents want to learn more about and lists ways City officials can better communicate with the public.

Organized in response to community feedback gleaned from multiple forums and listening sessions, June's #GRTalksBack Community Listening Sessions captured the opinions of hundreds of residents. During each meeting, facilitators engaged the public in a series of education and community dialog sessions relating to police and community relations. The meetings, in all wards, updated constituents on the progress the City is making; explained what the City plans to do; and sought feedback from residents on whether the City is on the right track in meeting community expectations. The City also shared information on the status of the community-led Safe Alliances for Everyone (SAFE) and 12- Point Plan for Community and Police Relations plans. It also detailed the status of the Traffic Stop recommendations.

Shannon Cohen, Anita Jones and Rebeca Velazquez-Publes led a wider team of facilitators who directed each community meeting. The three facilitators also compiled the Executive Summary centering on the six themes that were discussed at the #GRTalksBack sessions. The facilitators report that a couple of dominant ideas in each theme category continued to surface across all five community forums. They include:

Communication and Community Engagement

- Residents desire ongoing opportunities to connect with neighbors and City/GRPD leadership re: all six themes.
- Expand 'Read, See, Hear' publicity and outreach strategies for forums to all residents, but with a special focus on communities most impacted by disparities.

Policies and Procedures Review

- Taskforce selection should demographically represent the neighborhood and challenge nepotism.
- Need more accountability within Police Union Contracts.

Arrest Disparity Study

- Residents want to see tangible action taken on existing arrest disparity study recommendations before additional studies commence.
- Why has the City been silent in response to the critique and secondary study presented by former Chief Harry Dolan's group. How will the City address the 'discredit' presented by this secondary study?



City of Grand Rapids

Police Officer Training

- Effectiveness and measurements for training [i.e: outcomes, evaluation, dashboard metrics, etc.]
- Transparency re: identity/demographics of the trainers, curriculum content, and the frequency of training

Police Officer Hiring

- Incentives for hiring city residents. Incentivize existing officers to live in the city.
- Police officers should reflect the communities they serve.

Body Cameras

- Need a better understanding of how body cameras are used/managed [i.e., policies, procedures, how are the recordings being used, who has access]
- How is GRPD measuring the effectiveness of body camera usage?

In addition to the encapsulation of dominant ideas, facilitators also employed a team of visual graphic reporters to generate a citywide perspective of themes. The visual notes in the Executive Summary (one from each session and one depicting the collective theme from all meetings) depict quotes, comments and ideas from residents. The notes serve as another lens to use in reflection on conversations from the sessions.

City Commissioner Joe Jones, who helped to design the five meetings as part of the City's new authentic outreach plan, said the "listen only" approach generated robust community feedback at each meeting.

"We feel the Community talk back sessions were a success based on the amazing feedback we garnered from residents who attended," Commissioner Jones said. "The use of outside, non-City employed, community-based facilitators and community liaisons promoted a greater level of trust. It's an approach that I think we'd like to use as we continue to strengthen the bond between the community and its police department."

Collectively, the facilitators wrote in the Executive Summary that they are look forward to helping advance next steps and are, "...excited to continue the work of implementing locally-driven solutions to address racial equity disparities and relationship building within our community."

They suggested a couple of next steps to bolster community engagement. One includes organizing more strategic sessions with communities of color. The facilitators suggested that event attendance was not representative of the racial demographics of the city. According to



City of Grand Rapids

the facilitators, residents commented that forums were not reflective of the voices of those most impacted by disparities (youth of color, Black men, Black women, communities of color).

“Without their voices, we run the risk of a skewed data picture from which actions by the City and GRPD will emerge,” the facilitators wrote.

The team also suggested adopting a couple of action steps to build confidence in the City taking tangible action on feedback shared at forums. The facilitators recommended developing a timeline for not only sharing minutes and visual notes from the #GRTalksBack forums, but also the plan of action for following recommendations from the Traffic Stop study and other community meetings.

City Manager Greg Sundstrom said that additional community engagement meetings will be announced in the next few months. He also pledged that the City will answer the hundreds of questions generated from residents at the #GRTalksBack forums, the Linc Up meeting and the Traffic Stop Study Final Report community meetings. By August 20, the City will post a Q&A report online and social media. It will also distribute it via e-mail to those people who attended the #GRTalksBack forums.

###